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Decoder Ring--Fireside Fiction Keeps the Stories Coming via Crowdfunding and Subscription

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Decoder Ring — Fireside Fiction Keeps the Stories Coming via Crowdfunding and Subscription

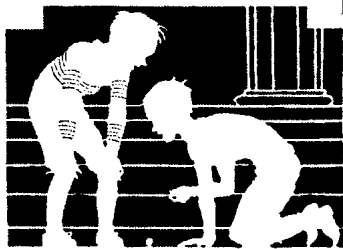
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Boston newspaper editor **Brian White** started *Fireside Magazine* in 2013 to offer a venue for good storytelling. *Fireside* used **Kickstarter** to fund the print run of each of the first three issues in that first year.

Despite the considerable success in just getting off the ground, **White** quickly realized he needed to change his approach. *Fireside Magazine* changed to *Fireside Fiction*. Print changed to online and eBook, with a **Kickstarter** to fund all of *Fireside's* Year Two at once instead of per issue.¹ Year Three also saw help from **Kickstarter** (disclosure: I'm a **Kickstarter** supporter myself). In 2015, the small publisher is trying to move from its **Kickstarter** roots to a more fluid subscription system.

White repeats often that "**Fireside Fiction Company** has two goals: publishing great storytelling and fair pay for writers and artists."² To the second end, *Fireside* pays writers 12.5 cents per word, equating to \$500 for a 4,000-word story or \$125 for 1,000-word flash fiction. Each issue contains a mix of story lengths and genres.

The *Fireside* Website is a delightful reading experience.³ Each issue features wonderful illustrations by **Galen Dara**, who won the 2013 **Hugo for Best Fan Artist** and was nominated for the 2014 **Hugo for Best Professional Artist**.⁴ Story and art content are elegantly woven together by Web designer **Pablo Defendini**, with a responsive, Word-



Press-driven site (using Pressbooks) that lets the content breathe and flow nicely in layouts aimed at different device screens. **White** noted *Fireside's* desire to "return to first principles" with this design,⁵ following exemplars such as *The Magazine*, *Medium*, and the responsive design gurus at **A List Apart** in what designer **Craig Mod** called "sub-compact publishing."⁶ The approach has really paid off, putting the story content front and center.

The site is not just easy to read, but free. "By making the site free, we are hoping to draw in a lot of new readers who hadn't thought about giving us a try before. And we're offering multiple ways for people to support us if they are enjoying it, including subscriptions, Patreon, and recurring payments through Paypal, and Amazon."⁷

Fireside offers eBook downloads in .epub and Kindle .mobi format by email to the previous **Kickstarter** supporters, or for a Patreon pledge of \$2 monthly⁸ (for the uninitiated, Patreon is a crowdfunding platform that differs from **Kickstarter** in that support is not necessarily tied to a specific project or time period). *Fireside* promises an eBook store is coming soon, presumably extending purchases to users beyond Patreon and **Kickstarter**.

The current installment,⁹ Issue 23, features **Andrea Phillips'** short "Children of Rouwen," with more great art from **Galen Dara**. It also offers the seventh chapter of **Lilith Saintcrow's** "She

Wolf and Cub" as well as flash fiction from **Renee Elizabeths**.

Stay tuned to *Fireside Fiction* not just for great short form storytelling, but to see what smart indie publishers are doing to get fiction to readers. 🐾

Endnotes

1. **Brian White**, "Fireside Magazine: Year Two," *Kickstarter*, March 5, 2013, accessed Jan 18, 2015, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/firesidemag/fireside-magazine-year-two>.
2. **Brian White**, "Fireside Magazine: Year Two."
3. **Fireside Fiction Company**, "Fireside: Many Genres, No Limits, Just Good Stories." Accessed Jan 17, 2015, <http://www.firesidefiction.com/>.
4. **Galen Dara**, "Galen Dara - Portfolio," accessed Jan 17, 2015, <http://www.galendara.com/>.
5. **Brian White**, "Fireside Magazine: Year Two."
6. **Craig Mod**, "Subcompact Publishing: Simple Tools and Systems for Digital Publishing," Nov 2012, accessed Jan 19, 2015, http://craig-mod.com/journal/subcompact_publishing/.
7. **Fireside Fiction Company**, email to **Kickstarter** supporters, Sept 29, 2014.
8. **Brian White**, "Fireside Fiction Company Is Creating an Online Multigenre Magazine," Patreon, accessed Jan 18, 2015, <https://www.patreon.com/firesidefiction>.
9. **Fireside Fiction Company**, "Issue 23." Accessed May 30, 2015, <http://www.firesidefiction.com/issue23>.

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Despite the challenges, **CUL** has licensed a number of titles in this way from vendors like **California Newsreel**, **Women Make Movies**, and several independent filmmakers. We have developed a workflow for obtaining and processing the files. Our campus IT division manages a streaming server using the **Kaltura Video Platform** where we are able to upload streaming files to be accessed by either the entire **Cornell** community or limited to specific courses, depending on the license terms.

As interest in streaming video continues to grow at **CUL**, we have begun to more clearly define our selection and acquisitions workflow to both streamline our efforts and to develop a clearer set of policies for how we want to grow these collections. For course use videos, we

now have a relatively clear path to determine if a video is already included in a database collection, which hosting vendor might supply the content, or how we can obtain rights to digitize and host the streaming file ourselves if the previous options are not possible. This allows us to respond to faculty requests as quickly as possible while finding the least expensive or labor-intensive path to providing access to the end user.

We are still in an experimental phase in developing long-term collection development policies around streaming video content. The biggest hurdle we are facing in this regard is that there are few options for perpetual access or ownership of streaming video content. Subscription databases and term licenses remain the norm. Some individual producers and distributors come close to perpetual ownership with licenses that cover "the life of the file" or something similar. **CUL** has licensed several

streaming titles under these terms, all of which have required us to host the files ourselves. We hope to see more true perpetual ownership models emerge in the marketplace soon.

Are we being earnest? For the most part, **CUL** has approached streaming video cautiously. We are trying a wide range of options to see which ones fit best for our collections and community. If recent history is an indicator, **CUL** will continue to explore new options as they arise with an eye towards learning what our users really expect compared to what we can provide as a library. In such a quickly evolving marketplace, this seems like the most earnest approach for the time being. 🐾